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US-Supported Human Rights Program in South Africa

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Background: The South African Human Rights Program was established in 1984, under the US Foreign Assistance Act, to promote "political, economic, social, judicial and humanitarian efforts to foster a just society and to help victims of apartheid." Administered at the US Embassy in Pretoria by the US Agency for International Development (AID), the program encourages the work of community-based nongovernment organizations. Because most of these organizations are small, the money granted to them--in amounts generally not exceeding $10,000--can help make them financially viable and also attract other funding sources. During the first 2 years, grants were made to more than 200 projects in South Africa. The program will total $1.5 million in fiscal year 1986, targeted specifically on projects and institutions that address the legal and other constraints to full equal rights and protection of all South Africans' civil liberties.

The program's goal is to assist those who aspire to the ideals of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Methods to achieve this goal include supporting victims of racial discrimination and fostering legal and social change by encouraging research, discussion, and awareness of human rights, promoting democratic principles and the free enterprise system, and increasing the openness of the judicial and legal systems for all. No support is provided under the Human Rights Program for partisan political activities.

The Human Rights Program is only one part of a larger US Government program, totaling $20 million in fiscal year 1986, to assist South Africa's black, colored, and Asian communities. Activities under the larger program provide:

- Scholarships to disadvantaged students for training in the US and in South Africa;

- Assistance to black labor unions, entrepreneurs, and businessmen; and

- Help to communities in their efforts to promote local well-being through schools and hospitals, and other such activities.

Funding criteria for Human Rights Program: Funding decisions are based on an evaluation of each proposed project's probable impact. In the short term, projects should increase the capabilities of organizations working for human rights. In the medium term, they should demonstrate potential for influencing government policy in areas of due process, freedom of speech, equal treatment under law, and general tolerance of diversity. In the long term, projects should lead to the recognition of full citizenship for all races, the improvement of human rights legislation, and the development of mechanisms for blacks to participate at all levels of government.

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Types of projects: Successful projects fall into four categories:

- Grants made to organizations providing legal assistance to members of the nonwhite community. Among these was a $10,000 grant in April 1985 to the Legal Education Center of the Black Lawyers' Association for the funding of a library of basic legal matters. The center was launched in January 1985 with grants from the Ford and Carnegie foundations for use in establishing programs to facilitate placement of black law graduates as law clerks; formulating continuing education courses and seminars for black lawyers; undertaking legal research into areas affecting black people; and establishing law clinics to provide advice to black communities. This is the only program of its kind undertaken by an entirely black organization, and the center will be greatly facilitated by the creation of the library. Grants also have been made to other law-related projects such as the Lawyers for Human Rights to set up an office in Pretoria and the Center for Applied Legal Studies to fund a seminar on black participation in the legal profession.

- Grants concerned with the effects on blacks of the South African Government's educational policies. In October 1985 a $10,000 grant for the purchase of data processing equipment was made to the Careers Research and Information Center (CRIC). Founded in 1977 after the Soweto uprising, CRIC sought to help scholars and young adults plan their futures. The project has been administered nonracially, although its prime audiences are black pupils and their teachers. The new data processing equipment will enable CRIC to expand its testing and career counseling services for black and colored students in the Western Cape region. Such assistance will help them overcome South African social barriers. Other funded education projects include the South African Committee for Higher Education Distance Learning Project, designed to counter obstacles to the upgrading of black education, and the Industrial Aid Center Adult Literacy Program, established to inform workers, especially the unemployed, of their legal rights.

- Grants made to organizations promoting private enterprise and development and organizational skills in black communities. The Youth Program of the Foundation for Social Development, awarded an $8,500 grant in October 1985, promotes self-reliance and organizational skills within educational and recreational programs. The National Build a Better Society Association, granted $7,000, is establishing a program to advise individuals and disadvantaged communities on financial matters and personal and home management to help people make informed decisions, develop leadership qualities, and create community awareness.

- Grants made to projects addressing the problem of resolving the social tensions in South African society. For example, the Workshop of Negotiation Techniques, sponsored by the Center for Intergroup Studies and funded by a grant of $10,000, is concerned with research and education in conflict resolution and race relations.

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